

The Columnist as Superstar

INSIDE STORY. By Brit Hume. Doubleday. 304 pp. \$7.95

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By ANTHONY MARRO

WHEN THE HEARINGS were over and the Senate Judiciary Committee had endorsed the fitness and integrity of Richard Kleindienst for the second time, James Eastland of Mississippi, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee and Sunflower County's best-known landlord, emerged from his office chomping on a cigar and stepped in front of the battery of microphones, klieg lights and television cameras.

What had the seven weeks of hearings, the dozens of witnesses and the thousands of pages of testimony produced? he was asked.

"Nothing," he snorted and walked away.

He was wrong, of course. The hearings into the ITT case (technically, the confirmation hearings on Kleindienst's nomination to be attorney general) had showed clearly that there was a dangerous arrogance among President Nixon's men, that the administration had been more sensitive to the needs of bloated

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and powerful corporations than to the needs of the urban poor, and that the custodians of our government apparently had no qualms about lying blatantly and repeatedly under oath. The transcripts of the hearings in fact were so clouded by evasions, contradictions and outright lies that when Democratic Senator Quentin Burdick of North Dakota protested that "someone is not telling the truth," it sounded more like a punch line than a complaint.

The ITT affair was the first of the Nixon administration's major scandals, and while it still isn't clear just what if any connection there was between a favorable out-of-court settlement given ITT in three antitrust suits and a pledge by the conglomerate to underwrite up to \$400,000 of the cost of the 1972 Republican National Convention, it is clear that Nixon overruled the Justice Department's antitrust division and ordered it to lay off ITT.

All this was back before Watergate, and for a while it was the hottest story in town. Jack Anderson, who had published in his Merry-Go-Round column the Dita Beard memo that linked the \$400,000 pledge to the out-of-court settlement and had forced a public airing of Kleindienst's role in the action, was declared the professional descendent of Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell and put on the cover of Time Magazine. Brit Hume, the young reporter who actually wrote the

columns, emerged from Anderson's shadow to become a media celebrity in his own right, invited to television talk shows, much-demanded on the lecture circuit and coaxed onto "what-I-know-about-journalism" panels.

"The ITT affair was the best thing that ever happened to my career," Hume writes in *Inside Story*. "I was virtually unknown before it began, despite several years with Jack and the publication of my (first) book (*Death in the Mines*). Now I was well known throughout the news business and even known to some outside it . . . Kleindienst might have survived the ITT affair in one piece, but I had come through it much better."

This is not just a gratuitous bit of self-promotion. The story and Hume's own reporting had been under attack, and had he not been able to defend himself as well as he did his own credibility and the credibility of the Anderson column would have been marred for a long time to come. Making a mistake in a major national story is a bit like running the wrong way with a football in the Rose Bowl; no matter what you do later in life, it's the one thing that's remembered. It was a different matter to have your story challenged by the likes of John Mitchell in 1972 (again, this was pre-Watergate and he hadn't yet been indicted for lying under oath to the Senate Watergate Committee, the federal grand jury, the FBI and virtually everyone he

(Continued on page 2)

Inside Story

(Continued from page 1)

talked to about the case), and one of the things Hume does best in the book is describe the enormous pressure he felt during those months, when a parade of government officials and ITT executives desperately tried to shoot down his story.

It is understandable then that the bulk of this book is devoted to the ITT case and how he reported it. The chapters on ITT are absorbing and probably as good a retelling as there is to be found of the ITT affair and how it grew. What is disappointing is that they add so little to the public knowledge; that they are mostly a rehash—albeit a well written one—of the original columns, his Senate testimony, and an article that he wrote for *Harpers Magazine* in 1972.

Hume gives Nader lawyer Reuben Robertson some long overdue and much deserved credit for tenaciously fighting ITT's expansion programs at a time when the entire antitrust division of the Department of Justice was—at Nixon's orders, we now know—taking a dive. And he makes clear as most other reporters have not that the Judiciary Committee never conducted a serious investigation; it merely provided a forum—sometimes a hostile one, but nonetheless a forum—for Kleindienst, Mitchell and a string of ITT executives to protest their innocence and cry that they had been unfairly maligned.

"Not a single subpoena had been is-

sued, except for Dita Beard's testimony," he writes, "and not a single investigator had been put on the trail of the leads Jack and I had furnished. Instead, the witness list had been packed with pro-Administration witnesses and the schedule had been conveniently juggled by the chairman to lend their testimony maximum impact."

But some major revelations—the tape recording of Nixon's order to Kleindienst to stay away from ITT, for example—came after Hume apparently had finished his book. Others, such as evidence of a well-orchestrated lobbying attempt to discredit then-antitrust chief Richard McLaren and undermine his policies, are mentioned only in passing, suggesting that Hume stopped reporting the story shortly after the hearings ended and wrote the book from what he already had in his notes.

The ITT story takes up half of the book; the rest is given to tales of life inside the merry-go-round. Hume spent three years with Anderson, helping him produce the seven newspaper columns, five television commentaries, and seven radio shows that the Anderson operation on K Street turns out each week. Learning to be a reporter can be like learning electricity by shock, and Hume made mistakes and got burned a couple of times along the way. To his credit, he makes his *mea culpas* in public, admitting that if he could do it again he probably wouldn't write a story, based on questionable evidence, suggesting that the son of a prominent politician was a homosexual; and he makes a couple for Anderson too, (exculpating himself along the way), describing in meticulous detail the gross carelessness that caused Anderson to damage his own credibility by reporting—and then having to retract